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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

17 October 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Operations of a
Front Air Army in Support of a Tank Army

1. The enclosed Intelligence Information Special Report is part of a series now in preparation based on the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal 'Military Thought'. This article presents comments on a previous article on the same subject. The authors cite that article's shortcomings relating to the role and actions of the front strike grouping and the opposing groupings, then proceed to establish possible tasks of supporting aviation and appropriate allocation of flight resources based on their concept of a ground situation. Such questions as advance planning, the covering of a tank army against enemy air strikes, and the employment of military transport aviation also are examined. This article appeared in Issue No. 3 (70) for 1963.

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2. Because the source of this report is extremely sensitive, this document should be handled on a strict need-to-know basis within recipient agencies. For ease of reference, reports from this publication have been assigned

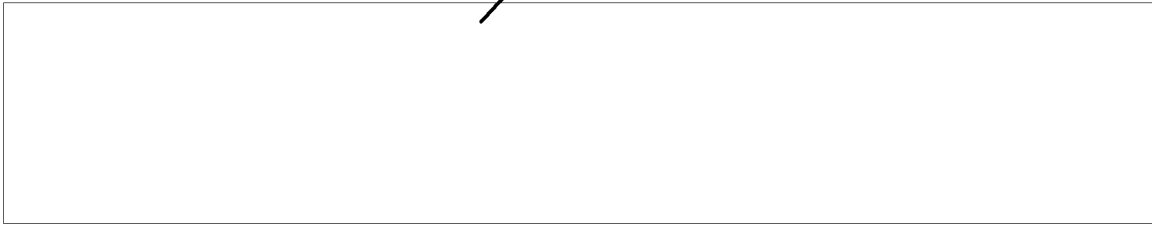
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William F. Nelson
Deputy Director for Operations

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Intelligence Information Special Report

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COUNTRY USSR

DATE OF
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Late 1963

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17 October 1975

SUBJECT

MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Operations of a Front Air
Army in Support of a Tank Army

SOURCE Documentary

Summary:

The following report is a translation from Russian of an article which appeared in Issue No. 3 (70) for 1963 of the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal 'Military Thought'. The authors of this article are Colonel I. Popov and Colonel I. Charikov. This article presents their comments on a previous article on the same subject. The authors cite that article's shortcomings relating to the role and actions of the front strike grouping and the opposing groupings, then proceed to establish possible tasks of supporting aviation and appropriate allocation of flight resources based on their concept of a ground situation. Such questions as advance planning, the covering of a tank army against enemy air strikes, and the employment of military transport aviation also are examined.

End of Summary

[Redacted] Comment:

[Redacted] The article to which it refers was [Redacted]

[Redacted] The SECRET version of Military Thought was published three times annually and was distributed down to the level of division commander. It reportedly ceased publication at the end of 1970.

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Operations of a Front Air Army in Support
of a Tank Army

by
Colonel I. Popov
and
Colonel I. Charikov

In the article of General-Mayor of Aviation S. Sokolov* there are raised important questions of the combat employment of an air army in an offensive operation of a front in support of its strike groupings. In our opinion, the author quite correctly raises the question of centralized employment of the main forces of the air army by the front troop commander for accomplishing the most important tasks (destroying means of nuclear attack, combating approaching reserves, conducting aerial reconnaissance, landing airborne landing forces and supporting their actions, and also covering troops of the front against enemy strikes from the air). It is convincingly shown that significantly more flight resources must be allocated for support of a tank army than for other formations of the ground forces.

Side by side with positive solution of a number of questions connected with the support and assistance of the combat actions of a tank army, the main problems of the topic receive, to a certain extent, more one-sided exposition in the article. The place and role of the main strike grouping of the front in achieving the objectives of offensive operations and the possible nature and conditions of its actions in conducting an operation to the full depth of the theater of military operations are not shown adequately. And the possible opposing grouping, its composition and nature of actions are only tentatively established. In connection with this, the forces and means of the supporting aviation and the nature of employing it in support of a tank army are not absolutely correctly determined.

In reviewing the questions of employing an air army in support of the main strike grouping of front troops, we will proceed from the tenet that the tank army is employed in an offensive operation in the initial period of a war in the first echelon of front troops. In the article of General-Mayor of Aviation S. Sokolov, this basic tenet is poorly emphasized.

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* Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought", No. 4 (65) for 1962.

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First of all, let us establish the possible tasks of the supporting aviation and what flight resources it is necessary to provide for a tank army under modern conditions.

The main tasks of the air army are combating enemy means of nuclear attack and aviation, neutralizing his control posts, combating troop groupings, especially tank groupings; conducting aerial reconnaissance; covering against strikes from the air; landing airborne landing forces and reconnaissance sabotage groups; reinforcing troops of the army by air with motorized rifle units and subunits, and also supporting the troops of the army with certain types of materiel.

What air strength is required for accomplishing these tasks in support of the tank army? An answer to this question can be given if one knows what kind of enemy may be opposing the tank army in an offensive operation.

In accomplishing the immediate task, the tank army may encounter opposition in a border area (zone) from enemy forces with an overall strength of up to an army corps (three or four divisions, including the army reserves); in the course of developing the offensive into the depth, it will be forced to carry on combat with the reserves of an army group also up to an army corps (two or three divisions) in strength, and in accomplishing the subsequent task the efforts of the tank army will be concentrated on crushing deep reserve groupings, disrupting the deployment and mobilization of new reserves, and on seizing important areas on the line of the final objective of the offensive operation of the front. As the practice of district exercises shows, in this period the army, in cooperation with the rocket troops of the front and aviation, is dealing with one or two groupings with an overall strength of up to two army corps (two or three divisions in each). Consequently, in carrying out an offensive operation, the tank army, in cooperation with the rocket troops of the front and aviation, has to successively defeat up to four army corps (10 to 12 divisions).

The organic means of nuclear attack of these enemy land groupings and those means attached for reinforcement (allowing for 50 to 60 percent of the means of one army corps and three or four divisions having been destroyed by our first nuclear strike) may constitute up to 60 batteries and battalions of short-range free-flight and guided missiles (not counting the operational-tactical weapons), which may go into action against the troops of the tank army during the operation. Combating these means of nuclear attack, while the troops of the tank army are delivering deep, swift thrusts and operating considerably apart from the other troop

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groupings of the front, is one of the most important tasks of all branch arms, and especially of supporting fighter-bomber aviation. To ensure the success of the actions of the tank army in combating large reserve groupings and achieving the objective of the operation in a short period of time, it is necessary to destroy all these means before the main forces of the army enter the engagement. In other words, the enemy missile/nuclear grouping must be crushed while the army is located outside the zone of destruction of these means of nuclear attack.

Fighter-bomber aviation is capable of quickly carrying out a search for the means of nuclear attack under the complex conditions of the situation and of destroying them immediately upon detection. However, the author for some reason assigns the majority of such tasks to missiles. This does not conform to the basic requirement for the successful conduct of a meeting engagement -- to deprive the enemy in the shortest period of time of the capability of delivering a massed strike with nuclear and chemical weapons against the troops of the tank army before they enter into the engagement.

It stands to reason that, besides aviation, the operational-tactical rocket troops, the artillery, airborne landing forces, and forward detachments will be allocated for combating the means of nuclear attack. However, they will most of all find employment right during the meeting engagement. It is also necessary to keep in mind that there will be a limited number of nuclear weapons in the army, and that forward detachments and airborne landing forces will not always succeed in penetrating the deployment areas of missile groupings and successfully destroying the enemy means of nuclear attack in a short period of time.

Thus, the basic task of the fighter-bomber aviation supporting a tank army is combating the means of nuclear attack, especially the tactical ones. We shall show that in order to accomplish this task, allowing that the aviation will be assigned to destroy about 70 to 75 percent of these targets (i.e., up to 45 battalions and batteries), it is necessary to plan about 16 regimental sorties of fighter-bombers. And this is the minimum requirement. In order to satisfy it, it will be necessary to expend all the aviation resources which, in the article of General-Mayor of Aviation S. Sokolov, are planned for accomplishment of all the tasks in support of the army. Therefore, we cannot agree with the author of the article, who considers that the tank army should plan two to three or four to six divisional sorties for all tasks, depending on the combat strength of the air army. This is extremely inadequate. He evidently was proceeding from the strength of the air army, but we consider that it has to be reinforced

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to such an extent as to ensure aviation support that fully meets the requirements.

Taking into consideration the accomplishment of tasks by the air army in support of the tank army and other tasks (combating approaching reserves, neutralizing control posts, etc.), it is necessary to plan total flight resources for a tank formation of not less than 25 regimental sorties of fighter-bombers (with seven to eight nuclear bombs) and six to nine regimental sorties of bomber aviation. Of this number, up to 65 percent of the fighter-bomber aviation, in our opinion, will be employed for combating means of nuclear attack, up to 25 percent for hitting mobile reserves and other important targets, and up to 10 percent will constitute the reserve of the commander of the tank army.

Bomber aviation employing chemical weapons will be needed to deliver strikes on enemy reserve groupings advancing toward the tank army. The practice of exercises shows that bomber aviation employing these weapons will most often begin delivering strikes even before the main forces of the army join the meeting engagement and, obviously, before a nuclear strike is delivered against the enemy grouping. The purpose of this strike is to hit the enemy and effect favorable conditions, especially for the rocket troops, to destroy the enemy with a grouped nuclear strike.

We consider that it is necessary to plan the expenditure of flight resources in support of a tank army according to more specific tasks.

Depending on the specific situation, the greatest part of flight resources should be allocated for those days when the army faces the prospect of dealing with large enemy groupings in a meeting engagement. The practice of exercises of recent years shows that this may be more frequent while accomplishing the subsequent task. In this case, it is advisable to support its actions, developing at considerable distance from the other troop groupings of the front, mainly with bomber aviation. The limited tactical flight radius of fighter-bombers will not give them the capability of ensuring support of the troops of an army while they are operating at a considerable distance away from the remaining troops of the front.

One cannot agree with the assertion that under present conditions it is not possible for a front to allocate in advance specific aviation large units to a tank army. In this the author contradicts himself. The whole article is permeated with the idea of the necessity of concentrating the main forces of the air army for the support of the tank army, but it

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remains unknown to its commander until the very last moment of going into action who specifically will be supporting it.

We cannot imagine how it is possible in such a situation to plan ahead and guarantee reliable control and cooperation of troops with supporting aviation. We consider that the commanders and staffs of the tank and air armies must, if only in general outline, plan in advance and coordinate all the questions of combat employment of supporting aviation, especially to the depth of the immediate task; the actions of aviation during the accomplishment of the subsequent task may be determined also in general outline.

Not all goes smoothly with the covering of a tank army against enemy strikes from the air. In treating the questions of the cooperation of fighter aviation with surface-to-air means, it is not taken into consideration that the highly mobile actions of the troops of the tank army on separate axes in the majority of cases require the cooperation of fighters and surface-to-air missiles by zones. When surface-to-air missile troops are covering one grouping, fighter aviation must do the same thing, but for another grouping. This is especially characteristic when troops of the tank army are operating at considerable distance from the other groupings of the front, and this specific characteristic cannot be ignored.

In carrying out the subsequent task, it is required to allocate not less than one fighter aviation division specially for covering the troops of the tank army. Such a high requirement for fighters is caused by the fact that, during the accomplishment of the subsequent task, the troops of the tank army will, as a rule, be outside the covering zones of the surface-to-air missile troops of the air defense of the front, and their own surface-to-air missile means, being constantly on the move, will not be in a position to reliably cover the troops. This will have a negative effect on the rate of development of the actions of the tank large units of the army, and it may be the cause of reducing their striking force. This is why, in the discussion of covering tanks, the main hope has been placed on the fighter aviation.

In the article of General-Mayor of Aviation S. Sokolov, only some of the questions of employing military transport aviation in support of a tank army are touched upon. The basic task of the transport aircraft and helicopters of the air army of the front will be, as is apparent from the article, air delivery of certain materiel for the troops of the tank army. Fine if this were so. The practice of exercises testifies differently. The most characteristic tasks of transport aviation (helicopters) will be:

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dropping airborne tactical landing forces and reconnaissance groups; airlifting missiles with nuclear and chemical warheads; delivery by air of engineer subunits, chemical subunits, and other subunits; and replenishing tank units with crews, crews for the rocket troops, and other specialists. Only after this will the aviation be employed to supply troops with materiel. Obviously, given such a sequence of accomplishing tasks, the troops of the tank army may be left without materiel supply in the event of their being supported by the limited transport means of the air army.

Calculations confirm that it is advisable to have constantly at the disposal of the commander of the tank army one regiment of helicopters. It will ensure the simultaneous movement by air of three motorized rifle battalions (a pontoon bridge battalion) or delivery of one fueling for one division (around 350 to 400 tons). In individual cases the requirement for aviation transport means can turn out to be considerably higher. Therefore, in planning the combat actions of the air army, it is necessary to allocate a reserve of transport aviation forces (up to two to three regimental sorties), which the commander of the tank army could use in support of troops in the period of their intensive actions. It is also important that there be in the reserve, as a rule, a helicopter regiment, and not military transport aircraft.

In a theoretical article it is not entirely correct to develop research only on the basis of what is with the troops. It is also necessary to see the future, which will be brought about by the requirements of the troops themselves. Only under this condition can we find an advisable organization of troops and work out ways of using them.

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